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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 000183

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: HIGH-LEVEL DISCUSSIONS ON ELECTIONS, CONSTITUTION

Classified By: Poloff Edward Bestic for Reasons 1.4 B and D

11. (C) SUMMARY: Senior Congolese political figures are holding a seminar in Kinshasa February 2, 3, and 4 to discuss electoral and constitutional issues. Key players such as opposition figure Etienne Tshisekedi and the Catholic Church will not participate. Ideally, the conference will lead to tangible progress on the constitution and an announcement of concrete next steps for electoral preparations, especially including the start of voter registration no later than June 12005. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) With EU and Belgian funding, the Congolese parliament and government are holding an "inter-institutional seminar" February 2-4 on elections and the constitution. The EU and Belgians originally intended for the seminar to serve as a means of jump-starting the constitutional drafting process. (Note: After one and a half years of existence, the Senate has yet to complete a final draft. End Note.) Given increased public anger in recent weeks at the notion that national elections might not take place in June 2005, event organizers decided to add the elections question to the seminar's agenda.

13. (SBU) The first day of the seminar (February 2) will consist of speeches by various high-level political figures. The second day (February 3), participants will break down into three working groups: one on electoral preparations and security for elections; another on financing of elections; and a third on constitutional issues. The third day (February 4) will consist of debate and discussion in the morning, followed by presentation of a final, collective report in the afternoon. Key ambassadors of the International Committee to Support the Transition (CIAT) have indicated they will attend not just the opening and closing ceremonies but also some of the working-level meetings. In addition, the CIAT plans to meet in extraordinary session the evenings of February 2, 3 and 4 to review each day's outcome.

14. (SBU) Critics of the transitional government have erroneously depicted the seminar as an attempt to renegotiate the Global and All-Inclusive Agreement and prolong the transition. The most notable opponent is UDPS party leader Etienne Tshisekedi, who was invited but has refused to take part in the seminar. (Note: During the week of January 24-28, tracts promulgated by M-17, UDPS and MLC circulated in Kinshasa calling upon people to participate in a January 28 demonstration and a January 30 general strike, to protest against the seminar. Neither the protest nor the strike took place. End Note.) Another key group not attending is the Catholic Church. On February 1 Archbishop Laurent Monsengwo, president of the Catholic Bishops Conference, said the aim of the seminar was vague and that the Catholic clergy would not participate.

COMMENT

15. (C) Ideally, the conference will lead to an announcement of concrete next steps for electoral preparations, especially including the start of voter registration no later than June 12005. Also, we and others want to use the seminar to spur the Congolese into engaging in a real debate on constitutional issues--something that has not happened yet--and possibly even reach compromises on key issues such as the form of the state (federal vs. unitary) and type of regime (parliamentary, presidential, semi-presidential). We will report results--for better or worse--septels. END COMMENT.

MEECE